

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 09793 181033Z

12

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 DOTE-00 EB-11 H-03 INR-10 IO-13 L-03

NSC-10 PRS-01 RSC-01 SS-15 USSS-00 SY-10 FAA-00 PA-03

RSR-01 /094 W

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O 180922Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3801

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 9793

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, IS, LY, LE

SUBJECT: HIJACKING MEA PLANE

1. HIGH MEA OFFICIAL GIVE DCM FOLLOWING ACCOUNT HIJACKING MEA BENGASI-BEIRUT FLIGHT AS REPORTED BY CAPTAIN AIRCRAFT. BEFORE TRANSMITTING DETAILS OFFICIAL CONFIRMED THAT ALL PASSENGERS ON FLIGHT MANIFEST WITH EXCEPTION HIJACKER ARRIVED BEIRUT.

2. HIJACKER ASSUMED CONTROL AIRCRAFT 180 NAUTICAL MILES OUT OF BENGASI (ONE HOUR AND 19 MINUTES FLYING TIME) WHEN PLANE FLYING AT 33,000 FEET. HIJACKER HAD GUN AND SMALL FLIGHT BAG WHICH HE CLAIMED CONTAINED EXPLOSIVES AND ORDERED CAPTAIN IN BROKEN ENGLISH TO FLY TO LOD AIRPORT ISRAEL. CAPTAIN SAID HIJACKER APPEARED TO BE ARAB NATIONAL AND HE ENDEAVORED TALK ARABIC WITH HIJACKER, BUT LATTER INSISTED ON SPEAKING ENGLISH.

3. CAPTAIN OBTAINED FREQUENCY FOR LOD (123.40) FROM NICOSIA, CALLED AND RECEIVED LOD'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT. REQUESTED CLEARANCE BUT RECEIVED NO ANSWER. NICOSIA FINALLY TALKED TO LOD AND CLEARED AIRCRAFT DOWN TO 22,000 FEET. AFTER CAPTAIN HAD MADE A NUMBER OF FRUITLESS EFFORTS TO

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 09793 181033Z

REACH LOD, NICOSIA SUGGESTED CAPTAIN USE INTERNATIONAL DISTRESS

FREQUENCY 121.5 AND NICOSIA WOULD MONITOR. LOD, HOWEVER, ACKNOWLEDGED CALLS ONLY AFTER AIRCRAFT WAS OVER LOD AIRPORT AT 22,000 FEET. AT THAT POINT LOD INFORMED CAPTAIN HE COULD NOT ENTER ISRAELI AIR SPACE AND THAT ALL RUNWAYS WERE BLOCKED. CAPTAIN ADVISED ISRAELIS HE HAD NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO LAND IN ISRAEL. AFTER CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION, CAPTAIN FINALLY TOLD ISRAELI AUTHORITIES HE WOULD LAND WHATEVER THE CONSEQUENCES. AT THAT POINT AIRPORT AUTHORITIES CLEARED HIM DOWN THROUGH DIFFERENT LEVELS AND HE FINALLY LANDED ON RUNWAY .08.

4. CAPTAIN WAS ORDERED TO TURN OFF HIS ENGINES AND KEEP THE DOORS CLOSED UNTIL ARRIVAL ISRAELI SECURITY FORCES.

5. DURING THE WHOLE PERIOD OF THE HIJACKING, THE HIJACKER KEPT THREATENING TO KILL ALL ON BOARD IF PLANE DID NOT LAND IN ISRAEL. AFTER LANDING, HIJACKER BECAME HYSTERICAL CLAIMING AIRCRAFT HAD LANDED IN DAMASCUS BECAUSE HE KNEW ISRAEL AND LOD AIRPORT WELL.

6. ISRAELI SECURITY FORCES SURROUNDED PLANE AND OFFICER WITH LOUD SPEAKER INSTRUCTED CAPTAIN TO OPEN AIRCRAFT DOORS AND EVACUATE WOMEN AND CHILDREN THROUGH SAFETY CHUTES. CAPTAIN ENDEAVORED TO EXECUTE ORDER BUT WAS FORCED BACK INTO THE COCKPIT BY THE HIJACKER WHO REFUSED TO OPEN THE DOORS AND ASKED THAT ISRAELI SECURITY COME ON BOARD. AT THAT POINT HIJACKER FORCED A HOSTESS AT GUN POINT TO THE REAR GALLEY WHERE HE ORDERED A STEWARD TO SERVE HIM WHISKEY. SUDDENLY AFT GALLEY DOOR WAS OPENED AND THE HIJACKER WHO HAD IN THE MEANTIME OPENED THE MAIN REAR DOOR WAS PUSHED OUT OF THE AIRCRAFT AND APPREHENDED BY THE SECURITY FORCES. (MEA OFFICIAL ADMITTED ACCOUNT SOMEWHAT CONFUSING AND SAID WOULD CLARIFY WHEN HE HAD CHANCE TO TALK TO OTHER MEMBERS OF CREW. CAPTAIN WHEN PLANE ON GROUND, WAS IN FRONT OF PLANE AND THEREFORE NOT IN A POSITION TO OBSERVE ACTION IN THE REAR).

7. IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER, AIRCRAFT BOARDED BY ARMED COMMANDOS WHO SEARCH EVERYONE. PASSENGERS WERE THEN PERMITTED TO DISEMBARK AND CAPTAIN INFORMED BY SOME HIGH-CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BEIRUT 09793 181033Z

RANKING OFFICER THAT AIRCRAFT WOULD BE HANDLED AS A TRANSITING FLIGHT AND THAT HE COULD LEAVE AS SOON AS AIRCRAFT HAD BEEN REFUELED, ETC. BEFORE ENTERING TRANSIT LOUNGE, ALL PASSENGERS AND CREW WERE SEARCHED. AN OFFICER WHO IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS CHIEF OF POLICE, INTERROGATED CAPTAIN IN ARABIC ABOUT DETAILS OF INCIDENT.

8. SOMETIME LATER, GENERAL DAYAN APPEARED AND REQUESTED

CAPTAIN GIVE INTERVIEW TO ISRAELI PRESS. CAPTAIN SAID HE DID NOT HAVE AUTHORIZATION TO DO SO BUT WAS TOLD BY GENERAL DAYAN THAT HE MUST INFORM THE PRESS AS TO THE TRUE FACTS OF THE HIJACKING. CAPTAIN OBEYED AND CLAIMED TO HAVE LIMITED HIS STATEMENT TO A FACTUAL ACCOUNT.

9. PLANE DEPARTED LOD AT 1930Z, AUGUST 16, AND ARRIVED BEIRUT 2010Z.

10. MEA OFFICIAL STATED THAT TO CAPTAIN'S KNOWLEDGE, FLIGHT WAS NEVER INTERCEPTED BY ISRAELI MILITARY AIRCRAFT EVEN INSIDE ISRAELI AIR SPACE. JUST BEFORE LOD TWO MILITARY AIRCRAFT CIRCLED THE PLANE (IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT ISRAELI AIRCRAFT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING AIRCRAFT AS SOON AS IT ENTERED ISRAELI AIR SPACE BUT, OF COURSE, THIS PRESUMABLY COULD HAVE BEEN DONE WITHOUT CAPTAIN SEEING.)

11. CAPTAIN ALSO CONFIRMED THAT HIJACKER HAD BEEN DRINKING HEAVILY THROUGHOUT THE FLIGHT. HIS NAME ACCORDING TO CAPTAIN WAS MOHAMED MOHAMED EL-THOUMY, A LIBYAN NATIONAL BORN TRIPOLI 1937. MEA OFFICIAL WAS NOT SURE WHERE CAPTAIN OBTAINED INFORMATION BUT WAS CHECKING.

12. COMMENT: MEA OFFICIAL EXPECTED TO INTERVIEW REMAINDER OF CREW ON MONDAY IN ORDER TO CLARIFY SOME OF THE EVENTS WITHIN THE CABIN DURING THE FLIGHT AND ON THE GROUND, AS THE CAPTAIN WAS IN THE COCKPIT OR THE FRONT OF THE PLANE, AND PORTIONS OF HIS ACCOUNT WERE OBVIOUSLY NOT FIRST-HAND. BUFFUM

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